

Lessons Learned: New Teachers Talk About Their Jobs, Challenges and Long-Range Plans

Issue No. 3

Teaching in Changing Times

A Report from the **National Comprehensive Center
for Teacher Quality and Public Agenda**



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Introduction

Public Agenda has been conducting opinion research on attitudes about public education for nearly two decades, and during that time, one pattern of public thinking has emerged repeatedly. When typical citizens are gathered in focus groups and asked to talk about how education has changed over time, they frequently paint a nostalgic picture of schools of the past. For older respondents especially, the image is one of a distinctly simpler time for educators. Most students had two parents at home, and one was usually around to help with homework and school projects. Classrooms were filled with children from similar backgrounds and a similar start in life. Nearly all learned English from infancy. Children with physical and learning disabilities were generally hidden away in special classes or special schools. Typically, parents could be counted on to understand and support whatever measures teachers and principals took to ensure that schools and classrooms were orderly and that children behaved themselves and paid attention in class.

Kids from 40 countries

Regardless of whether this view was reality back then, it is clear that this is not true today. Single-parent families are common, as are families where both parents hold down full-time jobs. Children with special needs are included in nearly every aspect of school life. Schools and classrooms are filled with children of diverse backgrounds. When an elementary school in one of the wealthiest districts of Philadelphia's "Main Line" suburbs recently decided to display a flag for the nationality of every student in the school, there were at least 40 flags, representing children from the Far East, Africa, Latin America, Eastern Europe and the Asian subcontinent. Some of these children speak English as well as any child born here, but others are still struggling to

learn it. Some have well-educated parents who can readily support their children's learning, while others will be the first in their families to have significant educational opportunities.

Many parents wonder

Today, many parents question the degree to which schools and teachers operate with their child's best interests at heart. Four in ten parents (42 percent) say they need to keep "a close eye on the teachers and school to make sure my children get treated well."¹ Just 43 percent say that "all" of their child's teachers "handle discipline problems quickly and fairly," although another 31 percent say "almost all of them do."² Minority parents are even more likely to be concerned. African-American (40 percent) and Hispanic (31 percent) parents are more likely than white parents (25 percent) to say that a teacher has treated their child unfairly in the past few years.³ And parents of children with special needs are also more likely to voice doubts; 45 percent say their child's special education program isn't doing enough to prepare them for life after they finish school.⁴

Opportunities and challenges

The changes occurring in public schools today bring both opportunities and challenges. The diversity of today's public school student body reflects the fact that people from around the world still see the United States as a good place to build their future. And few of us want to go back to the days when special needs students were shut away from view and cut off from learning. But there is also little doubt that managing a classroom and motivating and encouraging students with different needs from different backgrounds and with different

¹ "Playing Their Parts," Public Agenda 1999.

² "Reality Check 2006," Public Agenda.

³ "Reality Check 2006," Public Agenda.

⁴ "When It's Your Own Child," Public Agenda 2002.

levels of family understanding and support is a more complex task. How well are new teachers prepared to deal with the new realities of America's classrooms?

"Lessons Learned" is a joint project of the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality and Public Agenda, designed to help leaders in education and government understand more about the quality of current teacher education and on-the-job support for new teachers. "Teaching in Changing Times" is the third report from the project. The previous two are, "They're Not Little Kids Anymore: The Special Challenges of New Teachers in High Schools and Middle Schools" and "Working Without a Net: How New Teachers from Three Prominent Alternate Route Programs Describe Their First Year on the Job."

The centerpiece of the project is a survey of first-year teachers across the country, including more than 100 items covering issues related to teacher training, recruitment, professional development and retention. The study explores why new teachers come into the profession, what their expectations are and what factors contribute to their desire to either stay in teaching or leave it. There are also important findings on how first-year teachers view policy issues such as merit pay and alternative certification. The findings are based on interviews with a nationally representative sample of 641 first-year schoolteachers, conducted by telephone or online between March 12 and April 23, 2007. See the methodology for further details.

The survey also covered a wide variety of themes concerning the training and support new teachers receive, and issues related to the nation's diverse and changing classrooms offered some interesting surprises. For example, in contrast with the views of many education critics, most new teachers gave high marks to their overall preparation, and most report

feeling confident and prepared for teaching in their first year. They say their training covered a variety of issues. More specifically, 92 percent say their coursework included classes on children's cognitive, emotional and psychological development, and roughly half (49 percent) found it to help "a lot" in the classroom. When it comes to direct instruction, of the 84 percent who learned the technique in training, nearly 7 in 10 (68 percent) find it helps them "a lot" now. And in terms of classroom management and discipline issues, large majorities (78 percent) say their education schools addressed the subject, with nearly 6 in 10 (58 percent) reporting their training to be especially helpful.⁵

These new teachers, however, were distinctly *not* prepared for the diversity of many American classrooms. It is not that they were not exposed to training that touched on these subjects. Indeed, three-quarters (76 percent) of new teachers say they were taught how to teach in an ethnically diverse student body, and more than 8 in 10 (82 percent) say their coursework covered teaching students with special needs. But the training that they received was, in their view, inadequate to prepare them for the reality that they encountered. And while the idea of classrooms full of students from all different ethnic backgrounds may lead one to think primarily of lower-income, urban schools, the concern was by no means limited to the teachers who were assigned to schools in poorer districts. Indeed, new teachers in high-needs schools were less likely to complain about inadequate preparation than those who found themselves in more affluent communities.

⁵ It is worth noting that new teachers in the nation's secondary schools and those entering the profession through alternate routes give slightly less glowing marks to their training. Their unique perspectives are discussed further in the first issue of the series, "Lessons Learned: New Teachers Talk About Their Jobs, Challenges and Long-Range Plans—Issue No. 1, They're Not Little Kids Anymore: The Special Challenges of New Teachers in High Schools and Middle Schools."

Finding One

Feeling confident: First-year teachers find their training comprehensive and useful

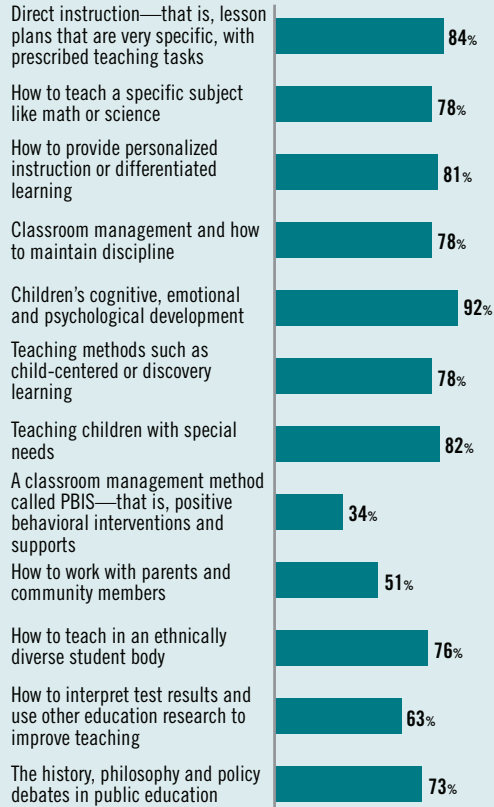
Experts and school critics have sometimes attacked teacher-training programs for being out of touch with reality, but many first-year teachers do not agree. They report that their training covered a wide number of topics from teaching specific subject areas to knowing how to manage a classroom and maintain discipline. Roughly 9 in 10 (92 percent) first-year teachers report, for example, that they learned about children’s cognitive, emotional and psychological development.

New teachers not only report learning about these topics in their classes, but they also say that what they learned helps them now in the classroom. Nearly 7 in 10 (68 percent) new teachers, for example, found their training on direct instruction to help them “a lot,” and nearly 6 in 10 (58 percent) say that what they learned in their coursework about classroom management helped them “a lot.”

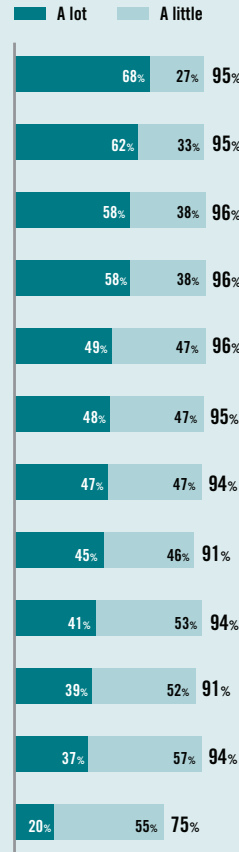
Given this strong endorsement of their training, it is not surprising that new teachers report that they were confident about their teaching in their first year. One teacher described her view: “The training was tough but useful. ... I believe I was prepared for any classroom.” Eighty percent reported that they were either “very prepared” (42 percent) or “somewhat prepared” (38 percent) for the classroom. The teachers were also positive about their ability to handle specific subject matter skills that they needed. Eight out of ten (81 percent) secondary school teachers said that they were always comfortable with their subject area, and more than 6 in 10 elementary school teachers say they are “very confident” in teaching reading, writing and math.

New teachers say their training covered a wide variety of subjects and that most of what they learned in teacher training is helpful in the classroom

Percent who say the following was covered in their coursework:



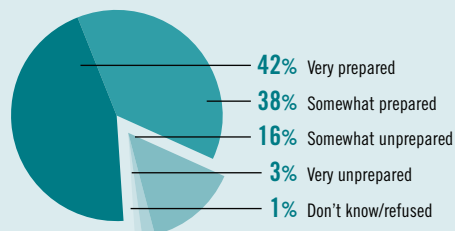
Percent who report their training helped them “a lot” or “a little”:



* Asked of those who said the subjects to the left were covered in their coursework.

Most new teachers feel prepared for the classroom

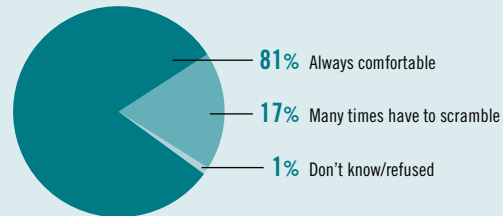
Overall looking back, would you say you were prepared or unprepared for this first year of teaching?



Note: Question wording in charts may be slightly edited for space. Full question wording is available in the Selected Survey Results at the end of this report. Percentages may not equal 100 percent due to rounding or the omission of some answer categories.

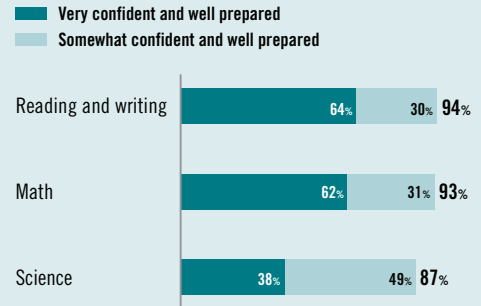
Most new high school and middle school teachers feel comfortable teaching in their subject area

Do you find that you are almost always comfortable with your knowledge of the subject area you are teaching, or are there too many times when you have to scramble to learn it yourself before you have to teach it?



Most elementary school teachers say they are “very confident” teaching reading and math

Percent who say they feel “very” or “somewhat” confident and well prepared in each of the following subject areas:*



* Asked only of new teachers working in elementary schools.

Finding Two

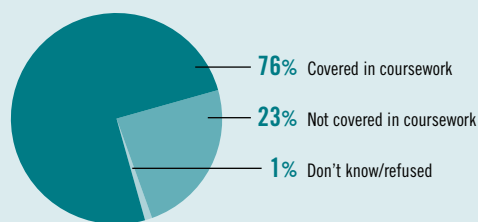
Dealing with diversity: The coursework just didn't help

Large numbers of new teachers describe themselves as distinctly underprepared for the challenges of dealing with the ethnic and racial diversity that they find in the classroom at a time when many schools have increasingly varied populations. One teacher elaborated on her experience: “At [the local school], there’s like 60 different cultures of students that go there.” Given the overall satisfaction levels with their coursework, this one specific area—the challenges of dealing with diverse classrooms—stands out as surprisingly different. It is not that the new teachers did not receive instruction in this area; 76 percent say that this was covered in their coursework. The problem is that the training they received did not prepare

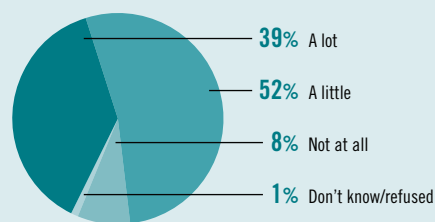
them for what they actually encountered. Only 39 percent said that their training in this area helped them “a lot,” which puts their evaluation of the effectiveness of this aspect of their training near the bottom of the list of subjects they studied. No other factor showed nearly as great a gap between how many received training and their assessment of the effectiveness of that training. What the new teachers are telling us, in other words, is that despite their training they just were not ready for what they found in their classrooms. As one teacher explained, “I was completely unprepared for dealing with the poverty issues and social issues that occur at my school.”

While most teachers say they were trained in teaching an ethnically diverse student body, fewer than 4 in 10 say that their training helps them a lot in the classroom

Percent who say how to teach in an ethnically diverse student body was covered in their coursework:



Percent who report this training helped them “a lot” or “a little”:*



* Asked of those who said it was covered in their coursework.

Finding Three

Suburban angst: The challenge of dealing with a diverse classroom is greatest in more upscale schools

One of the most interesting findings in the study is that the anxiety about dealing with diverse classrooms—the sense of being unprepared and untrained in this area—is greatest among new teachers in more upscale communities. Roughly three-quarters of new teachers working both in high-needs and in wealthier schools say their training covered how to teach in an ethnically diverse student body. However, new teachers who work in high-needs schools⁶ are significantly more likely to find that their training did in fact help them, with nearly half (47 percent) saying that their training helped them “a lot.” By contrast, less than a third (32 percent) of the new teachers in more affluent schools found their training to be helpful.

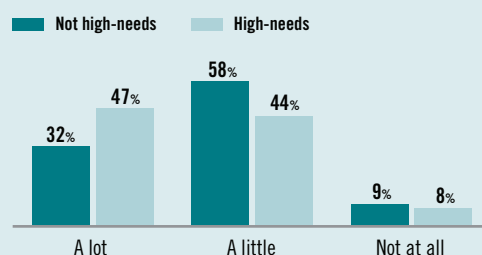
Although this is an area that could benefit from additional study, the findings here suggest that the teachers who are headed for more suburban and working-class schools are just not prepared for the diversity they will find. One student teacher who is teaching in a traditionally white neighborhood, for example, told us that in his school there are children from over 20 linguistic backgrounds. Contrary to the popular view that suburban schools are not racially integrated, suburban teachers in focus groups mention that they increasingly find themselves with a wide range of populations from cultures from Asia, Latin America, the Asian subcontinent, Eastern Europe and the Middle East.⁷

⁶ High-needs schools are defined as those where more than 50 percent of students receive free or reduced-price lunches.

⁷ See recent census research: “School District Demographics System,” National Center for Education Statistics 2006.

Teachers in high-needs schools are more likely to find courses that address the ethnically diverse classroom to be helpful

Please tell me if what you learned about how to teach in an ethnically diverse student body helped you in your classroom experience:



Finding Four

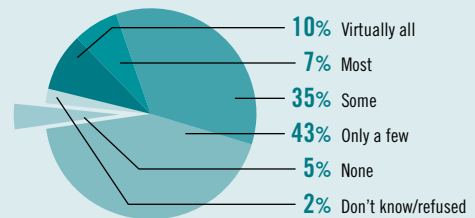
Special-needs children: Many new teachers say they could use better training here, too

Many new teachers report similar problems in dealing with classes that contain children with special needs. In addition to feeling overwhelmed by the cultural and ethnic diversity that they encountered in their classrooms, many new teachers say they were unprepared for the number of children they teach who have special needs. First, the presence of at least some children with special needs is nearly universal; only five percent reported no students with special needs. More than 8 in 10 (82 percent) of the new teachers said that they were taught to deal with the issues raised in teaching these children. Once again, however, the findings reveal a significant gap between the number of new teachers who received the training and the number who find it useful. Of those who say that they received training in this area, only 47 percent say that their training helps “a lot.”

One bright note is that although their training on teaching students with special needs may have been inadequate, 69 percent of new teachers say that they are receiving either excellent or good support from other teachers now that they are in the classroom, and 64 percent said that during their teacher training, their cooperating teacher was an “excellent” (31 percent) or “good” (33 percent) role model in dealing with this area.

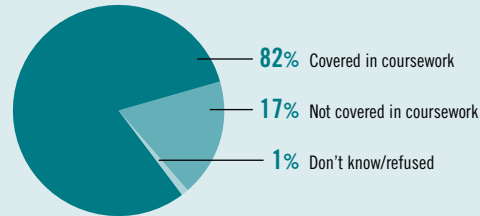
Nearly all new teachers say they have at least some special-needs students in their classrooms

In a typical class, about how many of your students would be classified as having special needs?

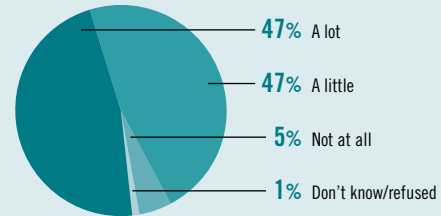


But while most new teachers say they were trained to teach special-needs students, less than half say that their training helps them a lot in the classroom

Please tell me if your coursework covered teaching children with special needs:



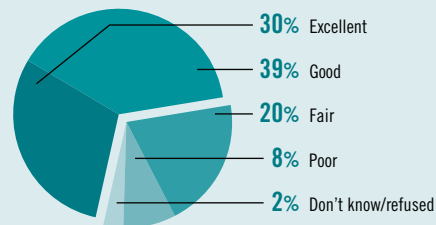
Please tell me if what you learned about teaching children with special needs helped you in your classroom experience a lot, a little or not at all:*



* Asked of those who said this topic was covered in their coursework.

Most new teachers say they get good support from colleagues in working with students with special needs

Now that you are in the classroom, please tell me how you would rate the support you feel you are getting from other teachers or mentors when it comes to working with special-needs students:



Finding Five

Send help: New teachers call for changes in their training and work conditions that will help them deal with diversity

The challenge of diverse classrooms is also reflected in the judgments new teachers make about what would really help them improve teaching and student learning. In the study, we presented the new teachers with a list of 14 proposals to improve teacher quality. Two items topped the list and were significantly ahead of all the others in terms of effectiveness. More than three-quarters (76 percent) of new teachers say reducing class size would be “very effective” at improving teacher quality, and 63 percent say the same about preparing teachers to meet the needs of a diverse classroom. These items were far ahead of other proposals such as requiring more training in subject areas (55 percent), increasing professional development (54 percent) or even increasing salaries (57 percent).

Although the two factors—reducing class sizes and providing better training for diversity—may seem unrelated, further questions reveal an interesting connection. When new teachers are asked why they support smaller classes, 6 in 10 say it makes it easier to provide more individual attention. Studies have shown that teachers who differentiate instruction can be successful in large classes, again suggesting that current training in this area may not be adequate.⁸ Our hypothesis, which bears more study, is that students with different needs require more individual attention in order to respond to challenges that stem from their diverse cultures and backgrounds.

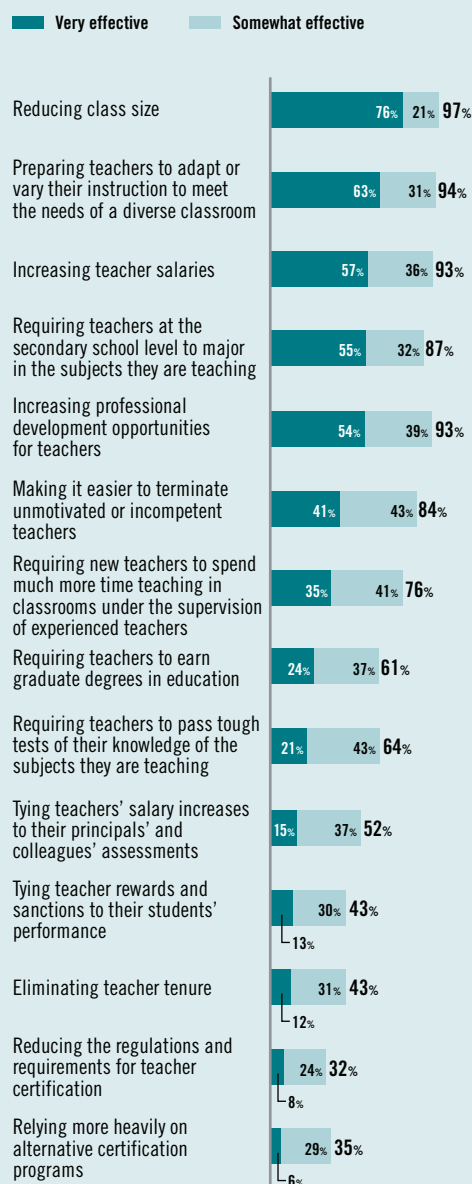
⁸ See for example:

Normore, Anthony H. and Illon, Lynn. “Cost-Effective School Inputs: Is Class Size Reduction the Best Educational Expenditure for Florida?” *Educational Policy*, v20 n2 p. 429–454, 2006.

Pedder, David. “Are Small Classes Better? Understanding Relationships between Class Size, Classroom Processes and Pupils’ Learning,” *Oxford Review of Education*, v32 n2 p. 213–234, May 2006.

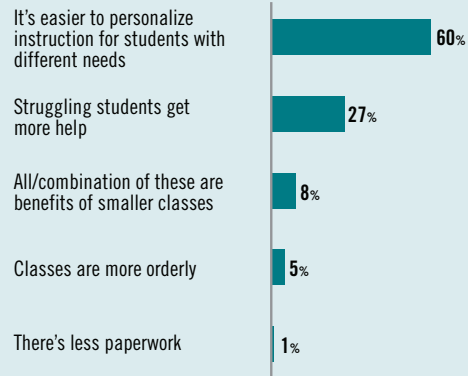
Most new teachers rank smaller classes and diversity training as the top ways to improve teaching

How effective do you think each of the following proposals would be in terms of improving teacher quality?



Most new teachers support smaller classes as a way to personalize instruction

Which of the following is the biggest benefit of smaller classes, in your view?



Afterword

By Sabrina Laine, Ph.D.

Director, National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality

Thoughtful educators across the country are considering a variety of ways to improve teacher training and to support new teachers in their first few years on the job. What these findings suggest is that teaching in diverse classrooms and teaching students with special needs in regular classrooms are prime targets for reexamination. The subjects are being covered to be sure, but not in ways that seem to track smoothly with what new teachers actually face in today's schools.

As never before, teachers are asked, if not required, to ensure that *all* their students achieve at high levels—no matter how varied their students' backgrounds and abilities are. The systems that prepare and support teachers to do this complex and difficult work must adapt to the realities of the 21st-century classroom.

To do this effectively, finding answers to a number of questions raised in this report is paramount:

First, given the limited time spent in preparation programs and the different aspects of their coursework that new teachers say they found helpful, what is most useful for new teachers to know and be able to do before they enter the classroom as teacher of record? What repertoire of strategies, skills and knowledge should new teachers be provided so that they can feel efficacious (and be effective) with students with differing learning styles, differing stores of prior knowledge, differing constraints on family resources and differing attitudes toward school and learning?

Second, given the strained relationship that many parents say they have with teachers, how can preparation programs provide new teachers with the confidence and cultural competence to work with parents as partners in their

children's learning? More broadly, how can preparation programs attend to both the intellectual and relational demands of teaching?

And third, because of the strong influence of cooperating teachers on teacher candidates who say they were either excellent or good role models when it came to learning to teach diverse students, how can preparation programs structure student teachers' field experiences and coursework to get the most out of both?

To find answers to these questions, greater investment in research, development and dissemination needs to be made. Researchers must step into classrooms and conduct rigorous research on teaching in the contexts in which it occurs—to learn what works under what circumstances and why. For example, what forms of differentiated instruction and inclusive teaching practices will help reach students with disabilities or English-language learners (or both)? Researchers must then, in turn, ensure that teacher educators learn from this research, so that they can better prepare new teachers for the challenges of diverse classrooms.

Finally, neither the burden nor the blame ought to be placed on preparation alone. The "realities" of today's classrooms are harsher in many cases than necessary. For example, many first-year teachers in high-needs schools say they are assigned the "hardest-to-reach" students, and 1 in 10 say they are teaching at least one class outside of their subject area of expertise. Proper placement and sound supports for new teachers need to be in place as they continue to hone their knowledge and skills. If they continue to work without a net, they will likely turn away from the profession or be less effective than we need them to be, regardless of the quality of their preparation.

The challenges of teaching a classroom with children with varying ability and from a variety of cultural, linguistic and economic backgrounds are growing day by day and are not well understood by most. On the flip side, the opportunities that such diversity brings—for greater cooperation and understanding and

empathy—are boundless. The clear implication of this report is that teacher preparation and new teacher support systems need to be reexamined and updated for the 21st century. It is important to heed the lessons that first-year teachers are teaching us.

Methodology

This survey includes interviews with a nationally representative sample of 641 first-year schoolteachers throughout the continental United States. We also conducted oversamples of teachers who participated in alternative teaching certification programs. Those interviews are not included in this analysis. Data were collected by telephone or online between March 12 and April 23, 2007. In designing the survey questions and sample, Public Agenda conducted interviews with leading experts from both university-based schools of education and alternative programs to discuss the sampling frame and the topics to explore in the survey. The National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality, the Farkas Duffett Research Group and REL Midwest were consulted further regarding sampling, survey topics and questionnaire design.

The sample includes oversamples of teachers in both Midwest and high-needs schools. The final data were weighted to account for the disproportionate sample design. Final results based on the general sample are representative of all first-year teachers' continental U.S. public schools. The margin of sampling error for the complete set of weighted data is ± 4 percent. The response rate for this survey was 29 percent, which is derived as the product of the contact rate (32 percent), the cooperation rate (89 percent) and the completion rate (99 percent). Respondents deemed ineligible because they were not first-year teachers or were no longer teachers were excluded from the survey. Further details on the design, execution and analysis of the survey are discussed on the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality website, ncctq.org.

Respondents were asked 111 items. These included screener questions to ensure our respondents were first-year teachers, demo-

graphic questions to describe the teachers who took part in our survey and closed-ended opinion questions. This questionnaire uses a blend of different kinds of questions, some of which tackle similar issues in different ways. Most questions ask the respondents to use a scale (either three or four points) to rate different aspects of their training or experiences teaching and to measure the strength of various beliefs they may have about teaching. The full questionnaire is available at ncctq.com and publicagenda.org.

Many of our four-point scales are Likert scales, where we ask the degree to which a respondent accepts a particular statement.⁹ In the report, we often collapse the choices to the nominal level by combining the positive and negative responses.¹⁰ Those interested in seeing the degree to which someone agreed or disagreed with the statement can consult either the charts in the report, which break out the strength of acceptance, or the full questionnaire and results at ncctq.com and publicagenda.org.

We also used questions in which respondents are asked to choose between two mutually exclusive and balanced statements involving trade-offs. Analyzed in context with other results, these "forced choice" items shed light on respondents' priorities and avoid the central tendency bias inherent in Likert-style questions. The choices themselves may be artificial, but they typically echo natural language gleaned from qualitative research. This questionnaire reflects the language and expressions used by teachers during focus groups

⁹ Likert, R. "A Technique for the Measurement of Attitudes," *Archives of Psychology* 140 (1932): 55.

¹⁰ Collapsing Likert scales into their nominal components (agree/disagree) is a commonly used technique in public opinion research. After transforming the data, they are subject to chi-square assessments.

for this project and from previous research with teachers.

For example, one of the questions asked of new teachers:

Which comes closer to your view?

1. I may be new to teaching, but compared with what other teachers are doing, my students are probably lucky to have me [OR]

2. I'm sometimes afraid that my students are paying a heavy price because of my lack of experience

This item is drawn directly from the qualitative research where a new teacher said in a focus group, “I’m a teacher to these kids. I’m not qualified at all. Yet I’m still possibly better than what could be there. It’s absolutely ridiculous.” Since the other teachers in the focus group agreed with this perspective, we decided to counterbalance the notion that students are lucky to have the new teacher with one that gives an equally reasonable but very different response. In this instance, the presentation of the second viewpoint is intended to test and probe whether this response is strongly held even when positioned against a robust alternative.

In a few instances, the questionnaire contains compound questions combining two seemingly separate concepts. The decision to combine concepts within a single item mirrors the way teachers discuss and couple ideas in focus groups.

For example, one item in our series of questions about potential drawbacks to teaching is the following:

There is so much testing and not enough freedom to be creative.

This item mirrors a comment by a new teacher in a focus group: “I think it’s absolutely a matter of testing taking away too much time. ... You are very restricted in the amount of time that you have to try new, creative theories, because you have to get this, this and this in before.”

Obviously, compound items could be asked separately, and other researchers may wish to tease them apart based on the results here—indeed, we invite them to do so. However, we believe these compound items capture authentic and useful information about new teachers’ overall priorities and concerns and are consistent with previous studies conducted by Public Agenda.

The focus groups

Focus groups allow for an in-depth, qualitative exploration of the dynamics underlying the public’s attitudes toward complex issues. Insights from participants in these focus groups were important to the survey design. All focus groups were moderated by Public Agenda senior staff.

Four focus groups were conducted. One was with participants in an alt-cert program in the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, region. Two more were also conducted in Philadelphia, one with senior education majors and master’s-plus students from an urban university and one with the same population from a suburban university. The last group was conducted in Chicago, Illinois, with first-year teachers in an urban alt-cert program and with urban master’s-plus students.

Follow-up e-mails

To more fully examine new teachers’ views on student behavior in the classroom and their teacher preparation, seven follow-up questions were sent to survey respondents who offered their e-mail addresses to researchers. Actual quotes were drawn from e-mail responses to give voice to attitudes captured statistically through the surveys.

Questions were as follows:

1. Thinking about your classes last year, how would you rate your students’ overall behavior—excellent, good, fair or poor?
2. Can you give an example of some students’ behavior last year that illustrates the rating you gave above?

3. Last year, what aspect of the job did you feel least prepared for?
4. Can you think of a particular classroom experience that you did not feel prepared for?
5. What was your *main* reason for becoming a teacher?
6. Now that you have a year of teaching experience, do you think this reason will motivate you to continue teaching? Why or why not?
7. Last year, did you teach in an elementary school, a middle or junior high school or a high school?

Selected Survey Results

	General sample (n=745)	General sample and in a high-needs school (n=372)	General sample and not in a high-needs school (n=373)
1 Would you say that you ended up choosing your current profession by chance, was it something you decided upon in college, or was it something you had been hoping to do for quite some time?			
Chose it by chance	8	9	7
Decided upon in college	28	26	28
Hoping to do for quite some time	62	62	64
Don't know	2	3	1
2 How important was each of the following factors to your decision to go into teaching?			
Teaching a subject that you love and getting kids excited about it			
One of the most important factors	44	43	47
A major factor	44	44	41
A minor factor	9	9	10
Not a factor at all	3	4	2
Don't know	1	1	—
The idea of putting underprivileged kids on the path to success			
One of the most important factors	37	45	28
A major factor	49	44	55
A minor factor	12	8	14
Not a factor at all	3	2	2
Don't know	*	—	1
Having a teacher who really inspired you as a student			
One of the most important factors	29	27	33
A major factor	38	37	39
A minor factor	22	21	19
Not a factor at all	11	14	8
Don't know	*	—	1
The practical job benefits such as summers off, more time with family and job security			
One of the most important factors	14	17	11
A major factor	39	38	38
A minor factor	35	31	39
Not a factor at all	12	14	12
Don't know	*	*	—
Having a parent or family member who was a teacher			
One of the most important factors	7	5	10
A major factor	17	18	15
A minor factor	17	16	18
Not a factor at all	58	61	57
Don't know	1	1	—

Note: The survey includes interviews with a nationally representative sample of 641 first-year schoolteachers and 224 teachers who participated in three alt-route programs (Teach for America, the New Teachers Project and Troops to Teachers). However, these topline results only includes the responses of respondents who came to teaching through traditional programs or alternate-route programs if they were contacted as part of our random sample.

3 Here are some things that are often considered to be drawbacks to teaching. Based on your personal experience, please tell us whether each is a major drawback, a minor drawback or not a drawback for you:

There is so much testing and not enough freedom to be creative

	General sample (n=745)	General sample and in a high-needs school (n=372)	General sample and not in a high-needs school (n=373)
Major drawback	42	45	43
Minor drawback	44	40	44
Not a drawback	13	13	13
Don't know	*	1	—

Too many kids with discipline and behavior issues

Major drawback	36	41	30
Minor drawback	45	41	49
Not a drawback	19	17	21
Don't know	*	*	—

Too many unmotivated students just going through the motions

Major drawback	34	38	31
Minor drawback	45	43	46
Not a drawback	21	19	24
Don't know	*	*	—

Low salary and not much opportunity for growth

Major drawback	33	37	29
Minor drawback	45	43	47
Not a drawback	22	20	24
Don't know	*	—	1

Teachers do not get rewarded for superior effort and performance

Major drawback	20	23	18
Minor drawback	50	49	49
Not a drawback	29	27	32
Don't know	1	1	1

There's a lack of support from administrators

Major drawback	17	20	14
Minor drawback	36	34	38
Not a drawback	47	44	48
Don't know	1	2	—

There is so little prestige associated with being a teacher

Major drawback	12	13	11
Minor drawback	35	35	36
Not a drawback	53	51	53
Don't know	*	*	*

Too many threats to personal safety

Major drawback	3	4	3
Minor drawback	29	32	25
Not a drawback	67	64	72
Don't know	*	*	—

	General sample (n=745)	General sample and in a high-needs school (n=372)	General sample and not in a high-needs school (n=373)
4 What is your best estimate for how many years you think you'll be a classroom teacher?			
Next year or two	4	4	5
3 to 5 years	12	12	12
6 to 10 years	14	14	13
More than 10 years	68	68	69
Not coming back next year	1	1	1
Don't know	1	1	1
5 Do you think of teaching as a lifelong career choice, do you think you'll probably leave the classroom for another job in education, or will you change fields altogether?			
Lifelong career choice	64	59	68
Probably leave the classroom for another job in education	27	30	24
Change fields altogether	6	7	6
Don't know	4	4	3
6 We'd like to know what factors might change your mind about leaving teaching. For each that you read, please tell me if this would change your mind, might change your mind or would not change your mind.			
A significantly higher salary			
Would change your mind	54	52	59
Might change your mind	37	37	35
Would not change your mind	9	11	6
Don't know	—	—	—
Working in a better-managed school with a more supportive principal			
Would change your mind	28	29	30
Might change your mind	38	41	36
Would not change your mind	33	30	34
Don't know	1	*	—
Reducing the number of students in your classes			
Would change your mind	27	28	26
Might change your mind	41	43	42
Would not change your mind	31	28	30
Don't know	1	1	2
More professional development in the areas you want most			
Would change your mind	20	18	24
Might change your mind	42	44	43
Would not change your mind	37	38	33
Don't know	*	*	*
Giving you merit pay when your students do really well			
Would change your mind	16	17	14
Might change your mind	43	38	49
Would not change your mind	40	44	35
Don't know	1	1	2
7 Regardless of where you currently teach, if you could choose the type of public school to work in, would you choose a rural school, a suburban school, an urban school or an inner-city school?			
Rural	42	45	38
Suburban	35	25	45
Urban	11	16	9
Inner-city school	8	11	6
Don't know	4	3	3

		General sample (n=745)	General sample and in a high-needs school (n=372)	General sample and not in a high- needs school (n=373)
8	If salary were not an issue, would you prefer to teach in a public school, or would you prefer to teach in a private school?			
	Public	78	76	82
	Private	18	20	16
	Don't know	4	4	3
9	Thinking about the profession of teaching, do you think that the nature of the job means teachers are never well paid, or do you think it is very possible for a teacher to make a reasonable living?			
	Teachers are never paid well	31	31	31
	It is very possible for a teacher to make a reasonable living	68	67	68
	Don't know	2	2	1
10	Given a choice between two schools in otherwise identical districts, which would you prefer to work in?			
	The school that paid a significantly higher salary	15	17	14
	The school where student behavior and parental support were significantly better	83	81	86
	Don't know	1	2	1
11	Given a choice between two schools in otherwise identical districts, would you prefer to work in...			
	The school that paid a significantly higher salary	20	20	20
	The school where administrators gave strong backing and support to teachers	79	79	80
	Don't know	1	1	1
12	In college, did you major or minor in the subject area in which you are teaching or not?			
	Yes	73	73	75
	No	26	27	25
	Don't know	*	—	1
13	Do you find that you are almost always comfortable with your knowledge of the subject area you are teaching, or are there too many times when you have to scramble to learn it yourself before you have to teach it?			
	Always comfortable	81	82	81
	Many times have to scramble	17	16	19
	Don't know	1	2	—
14	How confident and well prepared are you in each of the following areas?			
	Math			
	(Base: elementary school teachers)			
	Very confident and well prepared	62	62	61
	Somewhat confident and well prepared	31	30	33
	Not too confident and well prepared	3	5	3
	Not at all confident and well prepared	1	2	—
	Don't know	2	1	2
	Science			
	(Base: elementary school teachers)			
	Very confident and well prepared	38	41	38
	Somewhat confident and well prepared	49	44	52
	Not too confident and well prepared	9	10	8
	Not at all confident and well prepared	*	1	—
	Don't know	3	3	3

14	(continued) How confident and well prepared are you in each of the following areas?			
	Reading and writing (Base: elementary school teachers)	General sample (n=745)	General sample and in a high-needs school (n=372)	General sample and not in a high-needs school (n=373)
	Very confident and well prepared	64	64	64
	Somewhat confident and well prepared	30	32	29
	Not too confident and well prepared	3	3	3
	Not at all confident and well prepared	*	—	1
	Don't know	2	1	3
15	Now, thinking only of what you learned in your coursework and <i>not</i> during any fieldwork or student teaching, please tell me if each of the following was covered in your coursework or not:			
	Children's cognitive, emotional and psychological development			
	Covered in coursework	92	91	93
	Not covered in coursework	8	8	7
	Don't know	1	1	*
	Direct instruction—that is, lesson plans that are very specific, with prescribed teaching tasks			
	Covered in coursework	84	85	84
	Not covered in coursework	15	14	14
	Don't know	1	1	2
	Teaching children with special needs			
	Covered in coursework	82	81	83
	Not covered in coursework	17	18	16
	Don't know	1	1	1
	How to provide personalized instruction or differentiated learning			
	Covered in coursework	81	81	82
	Not covered in coursework	19	18	18
	Don't know	1	1	*
	Classroom management and how to maintain discipline			
	Covered in coursework	78	79	77
	Not covered in coursework	22	20	22
	Don't know	1	1	1
	How to teach a specific subject like math or science			
	Covered in coursework	78	81	78
	Not covered in coursework	21	19	21
	Don't know	1	1	1
	Teaching methods such as child-centered or discovery learning			
	Covered in coursework	78	78	80
	Not covered in coursework	21	22	18
	Don't know	1	*	1
	How to teach in an ethnically diverse student body			
	Covered in coursework	76	76	78
	Not covered in coursework	23	22	22
	Don't know	1	2	1
	The history, philosophy and policy debates in public education			
	Covered in coursework	73	70	77
	Not covered in coursework	26	28	22
	Don't know	1	2	1

15	(continued) Now, thinking only of what you learned in your coursework and <i>not</i> during any fieldwork or student teaching, please tell me if each of the following was covered in your coursework or not:					
	How to interpret test results and use other education research to improve teaching	General sample (n=745)	General sample and in a high-needs school (n=372)	General sample and not in a high-needs school (n=373)		
	Covered in coursework	63	64	62		
	Not covered in coursework	36	35	37		
	Don't know	1	1	1		
	How to work with parents and community members					
	Covered in coursework	51	52	50		
	Not covered in coursework	49	48	50		
	Don't know	*	—	*		
	A classroom management method called PBIS—that is, positive behavioral interventions and supports					
16	Covered in coursework	34	36	34		
	Not covered in coursework	64	62	64		
	Don't know	2	2	1		
	Now as I read you some of the areas that were covered in your coursework, please tell me if what you learned in this area helped you in your classroom experience a lot, a little or not at all:					
	Direct instruction—that is, lesson plans that are very specific, with prescribed teaching tasks					
	A lot	68	68	67		
	A little	27	28	28		
	Not at all	4	3	4		
	Don't know	*	1	*		
	How to teach a specific subject like math or science					
	A lot	62	59	66		
	A little	33	37	29		
	Not at all	3	3	4		
	Don't know	1	1	1		
	Classroom management and how to maintain discipline					
	A lot	58	58	56		
	A little	38	38	40		
	Not at all	4	4	3		
	Don't know	—	—	—		
	How to provide personalized instruction or differentiated learning					
	A lot	58	59	56		
	A little	38	37	40		
	Not at all	3	4	3		
	Don't know	*	—	*		
	Children's cognitive, emotional and psychological development					
	A lot	49	45	52		
	A little	47	51	44		
	Not at all	4	4	4		
	Don't know	—	—	—		
	Teaching methods such as child-centered or discovery learning					
	A lot	48	47	48		
	A little	47	46	48		
	Not at all	5	7	4		
	Don't know	*	1	—		

16	(continued) Now as I read you some of the areas that were covered in your coursework, please tell me if what you learned in this area helped you in your classroom experience a lot, a little or not at all:			
		General sample (n=745)	General sample and in a high-needs school (n=372)	General sample and not in a high-needs school (n=373)
	Teaching children with special needs			
	A lot	47	46	52
	A little	47	48	43
	Not at all	5	6	4
	Don't know	1	*	1
	A classroom management method called PBIS—that is, positive behavioral interventions and supports			
	A lot	45	45	49
	A little	46	47	40
	Not at all	9	8	11
	Don't know	—	—	—
	How to work with parents and community members			
	A lot	41	39	46
	A little	53	54	50
	Not at all	5	6	4
	Don't know	1	1	—
	How to teach in an ethnically diverse student body			
	A lot	39	47	32
	A little	52	44	58
	Not at all	8	8	9
	Don't know	1	1	1
	How to interpret test results and use other education research to improve teaching			
	A lot	37	35	41
	A little	57	56	54
	Not at all	6	9	4
	Don't know	—	—	—
	The history, philosophy and policy debates in public education			
	A lot	20	20	20
	A little	55	54	55
	Not at all	25	26	25
	Don't know	*	*	—
17	As part of your teacher preparation, how much time did you spend working with an actual public school teacher in a classroom environment?			
	Enough time	71	70	73
	Too much time	3	4	2
	Too little time	20	20	20
	Spent no time	5	6	4
	Don't know	*	1	*
18A	How many teachers did you work with?			
	One teacher	78	16	14
	More than one	18	84	86
	Don't know	4	—	—
18B	Approximately how many weeks did you spend with (that teacher/the teacher you spent the most time with)?			
	Less than 6 weeks	10	12	8
	More than 6 weeks	89	88	91
	Don't know	*	—	1

19	How would you describe the mentoring and feedback you received from your cooperating teacher (whom you spent the most time with) when it came to each of the following?			
		General sample (n=745)	General sample and in a high-needs school (n=372)	General sample and not in a high-needs school (n=373)
	Managing the classroom			
	Excellent	56	56	55
	Good	29	28	32
	Fair	9	10	8
	Poor	5	5	4
	Don't know	1	1	1
	Handling students who are discipline problems			
	Excellent	46	44	48
	Good	33	33	32
	Fair	15	14	15
	Poor	6	7	5
	Don't know	1	1	1
	Providing personalized instruction to students			
	Excellent	42	40	41
	Good	36	36	38
	Fair	15	15	14
	Poor	7	8	6
	Don't know	1	1	1
	Helping struggling students overcome their learning problems			
	Excellent	42	41	41
	Good	32	30	33
	Fair	19	21	18
	Poor	7	7	7
	Don't know	1	1	*
	Working with special-needs students			
	Excellent	31	29	31
	Good	33	33	33
	Fair	22	24	22
	Poor	9	9	10
	Don't know	4	5	4
	Keeping gifted students challenged			
	Excellent	27	25	27
	Good	34	32	35
	Fair	25	28	23
	Poor	12	11	13
	Don't know	3	4	2
20	Overall, would you say your cooperating teacher was a positive role model who helped inspire you as a teacher, a negative role model who did not share an inspiration for teaching, or would you say your cooperating teacher was not really a role model?			
		General sample (n=745)	General sample and in a high-needs school (n=372)	General sample and not in a high-needs school (n=373)
	Positive role model	88	88	87
	Negative role model	2	1	3
	Not really a role model at all	10	10	10
	Don't know	*	*	

	General sample (n=745)	General sample and in a high-needs school (n=372)	General sample and not in a high-needs school (n=373)
23 Overall, looking back, would you say you were prepared or unprepared for this first year of teaching?			
Very prepared	42	42	44
Somewhat prepared	38	37	40
Somewhat unprepared	16	16	13
Very unprepared	3	3	2
Don't know	1	2	1
24 Do you feel that your teacher training put too much emphasis on the theory and philosophy of education, or did it put too much emphasis on handling the practical challenges of teaching, or did it strike the right balance between the two?			
Too much emphasis on theory and philosophy	45	44	44
Too much emphasis on handling the practical challenges of teaching	3	4	2
Struck the right balance between the two	50	50	52
Don't know	2	2	1
25 Now that you are in the classroom, please tell me how you would rate the support you feel you are getting from other teachers or mentors in the following areas:			
Handling students who are disruptive or unmotivated			
Excellent	37	38	38
Good	37	33	39
Fair	19	20	18
Poor	7	9	5
Don't know	*	*	*
Creating strong lesson plans and teaching techniques			
Excellent	34	33	35
Good	41	40	42
Fair	16	19	14
Poor	8	8	9
Don't know	*	1	—
Working and communicating with parents			
Excellent	34	29	39
Good	42	40	43
Fair	17	22	12
Poor	7	8	6
Don't know	*	1	1
Working with special-needs students			
Excellent	30	27	32
Good	39	37	41
Fair	20	23	18
Poor	8	9	8
Don't know	2	5	1
26 Please tell us the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.			
Most days I feel really confident that my students are learning and responding to my teaching			
Strongly agree	48	44	49
Somewhat agree	46	49	44
Somewhat disagree	6	6	6
Strongly disagree	1	*	1
Don't know	*	*	*

26	(continued) Please tell us the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.			
		General sample (n=745)	General sample and in a high-needs school (n=372)	General sample and not in a high-needs school (n=373)
	Teaching is so demanding, it's a wonder that more people don't burn out			
	Strongly agree	38	44	34
	Somewhat agree	43	40	43
	Somewhat disagree	15	12	19
	Strongly disagree	4	4	5
	Don't know	*	1	*
	Teaching is exactly what I wanted—there is nothing I'd rather be doing			
	Strongly agree	56	54	58
27	Somewhat agree	33	34	32
	Somewhat disagree	9	9	9
	Strongly disagree	2	2	1
	Don't know	*	1	1
	Which of the following two statements comes closer to your own view?			
	I may be new to teaching, but compared with what other teachers are doing, my students are probably lucky to have me	79	84	76
	I'm sometimes afraid that my students are paying a heavy price because of my lack of experience	16	13	20
	Don't know	5	4	5
	Which comes closer to your view?			
	Good teachers can lead all students to learn, even those from poor families or who have uninvolved parents	74	75	73
28	It is too hard even for good teachers to overcome these barriers	8	8	9
	Not sure	17	17	18
	Sometimes, teachers with seniority have more say over where they teach and they end up working with kids who are easier to reach. Do you think that...			
	This is reasonable because veteran teachers have earned this benefit by putting in their time	25	26	24
	This is wrong because it leaves inexperienced teachers with the hardest-to-reach students	69	68	70
	Don't know	6	6	6
	And for you, as a first-year teacher, do you tend to have the hardest-to-reach students, or is this not the case for you in your school?			
	Tend to have the hardest-to-reach students	33	42	25
	Not the case	65	56	74
	Don't know	2	2	2

31	How would you rate the administration at your school when it comes to the following?			
	Supporting you in handling discipline problems	General sample (n=745)	General sample and in a high-needs school (n=372)	General sample and not in a high-needs school (n=373)
	Excellent	47	39	56
	Good	28	33	23
	Fair	16	19	13
	Poor	9	9	8
	Don't know	—	—	—
	Providing adequate resources like textbooks and well-equipped classrooms			
	Excellent	43	38	49
	Good	36	38	30
	Fair	14	14	15
	Poor	7	10	6
	Don't know	*	*	—
	Providing instructional leadership and guidance			
32	Excellent	40	34	46
	Good	33	34	29
	Fair	18	23	17
	Poor	8	10	7
	Don't know	—	—	1
	From what you have seen in your teaching experience, do you think that teachers who are coming out of traditional education programs are more prepared than those who take an alternative certification route, are they less prepared, or is there no difference?			
	More prepared	36	39	32
	Less prepared	6	6	6
	No difference	8	8	7
	Do not know enough to say	50	47	54
	Don't know	1	—	1
	How effective do you think each of the following proposals would be in terms of improving teacher quality?			
	Reducing class size			
33	Very effective	76	78	75
	Somewhat effective	21	20	23
	Not too effective	1	1	1
	Not at all effective	1	1	1
	Don't know	1	1	—
	Preparing teachers to adapt or vary their instruction to meet the needs of a diverse classroom			
	Very effective	63	66	62
	Somewhat effective	31	30	35
	Not too effective	3	3	2
	Not at all effective	1	1	1
	Don't know	2	1	1
	Requiring teachers at the secondary school level to major in the subjects they are teaching			
	Very effective	55	55	57
	Somewhat effective	32	30	35
	Not too effective	7	8	6
	Not at all effective	3	5	1
	Don't know	2	2	1

33 (continued) **How effective do you think each of the following proposals would be in terms of improving teacher quality?**

Increasing teacher salaries

	General sample (n=745)	General sample and in a high-needs school (n=372)	General sample and not in a high-needs school (n=373)
Very effective	57	60	54
Somewhat effective	36	31	40
Not too effective	5	6	4
Not at all effective	2	2	2
Don't know	1	1	1

Increasing professional development opportunities for teachers

Very effective	54	54	54
Somewhat effective	39	37	42
Not too effective	3	5	2
Not at all effective	2	2	2
Don't know	2	2	1

Making it easier to terminate unmotivated or incompetent teachers

Very effective	41	44	39
Somewhat effective	43	39	46
Not too effective	9	8	10
Not at all effective	3	4	3
Don't know	3	5	2

Requiring new teachers to spend much more time teaching in classrooms under the supervision of experienced teachers

Very effective	35	33	36
Somewhat effective	41	43	40
Not too effective	16	15	17
Not at all effective	6	8	5
Don't know	1	1	1

Requiring teachers to earn graduate degrees in education

Very effective	24	23	27
Somewhat effective	37	37	37
Not too effective	24	23	26
Not at all effective	13	16	9
Don't know	2	2	1

Requiring teachers to pass tough tests of their knowledge of the subjects they are teaching

Very effective	21	23	20
Somewhat effective	43	41	45
Not too effective	22	23	21
Not at all effective	13	12	14
Don't know	1	1	1

Tying teachers' salary increases to their principals' and colleagues' assessments

Very effective	15	14	17
Somewhat effective	37	35	39
Not too effective	24	24	25
Not at all effective	22	25	18
Don't know	2	2	1

Tying teacher rewards and sanctions to their students' performance

Very effective	13	12	13
Somewhat effective	30	34	28
Not too effective	27	24	29
Not at all effective	28	28	29
Don't know	2	2	1

33 (continued) **How effective do you think each of the following proposals would be in terms of improving teacher quality?**

Eliminating teacher tenure

	General sample (n=745)	General sample and in a high-needs school (n=372)	General sample and not in a high-needs school (n=373)
Very effective	12	16	8
Somewhat effective	31	28	34
Not too effective	27	26	29
Not at all effective	22	21	24
Don't know	8	8	5

Reducing the regulations and requirements for teacher certification

Very effective	8	9	8
Somewhat effective	24	23	22
Not too effective	29	25	36
Not at all effective	36	41	33
Don't know	3	3	1

Relying more heavily on alternate certification programs

Very effective	6	7	4
Somewhat effective	29	29	30
Not too effective	34	31	39
Not at all effective	20	24	19
Don't know	11	10	7

34 Which of the following is the biggest benefit of smaller classes, in your view?

(Base: those who think reducing class size would be very or somewhat effective at improving teacher quality)

Classes are more orderly	5	5	4
It's easier to personalize instruction for students with different needs	60	55	65
Struggling students get more help	27	29	23
There's less paperwork	1	1	1
All/Combination of these are benefits of smaller classes (Vol.)	8	10	7
Other	*	—	*

Characteristics of the sample

	Total (%)
Are you teaching any subjects that do not match your current certification or area of study?	
Yes	11
No	87
Don't know/Refused	2
Last school grade teachers completed:	
Less than a 4-year college degree	2
College graduate (B.S., B.A., or other 4-year degree)	59
Some post-graduate training or professional schooling after college (in Master's or Ph.D program, e.g.) but no degree	54
Masters, Ph.D or other higher degree	17
Teachers rank themselves in high school as:	
An excellent student	43
A good student	45
A fair student	9
A poor student	1
Don't know/Refused	1
Teachers who are of Hispanic or Latino background:	
Yes	7
No	91
Don't know/Refused	2
Race of teachers:	
White	84
Black/African-American	5
Asian	3
Other or mixed race	5
Don't know/Refused	3

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About the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality

The National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality is the premier national resource to which the regional comprehensive assistance centers, states and other education stakeholders turn for strengthening the quality of teaching—especially in high-poverty, low-performing and hard-to-staff schools—and for finding guidance in addressing specific needs, thereby ensuring highly qualified teachers are serving students with special needs.

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About Public Agenda

Founded in 1975 by social scientist and author Daniel Yankelovich and former U.S. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, Public Agenda works to help the nation’s leaders better understand the public’s point of view and to help average citizens better understand critical policy issues. Our in-depth research on how citizens think about policy has won praise for its credibility and fairness from elected officials from both political parties and from experts and decision makers across the political spectrum. Our citizen education materials and award-winning website, **publicagenda.org**, offer unbiased information about the challenges the country faces. Twice nominated for the prestigious Webby award for best political site, Public Agenda Online provides comprehensive information on a wide range of policy issues.

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